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HURRICANE EDITION

Officials rethink Uptown return plan

Reopening may be too soon for parts of area, some worry

By Michelle Krupa and Bruce Hamilton
Staff writers

New Orleans officials said Algiers residents will be allowed to return home today, but said they will reassess a preliminary plan for reopening parts of Uptown later this week.

Mayor Ray Nagin and Coast Guard Vice Admiral Thad Allen, federal head of New Orleans' hurricane recovery effort, are meeting this afternoon with other state and local officials.

Col. Terry Ebbert, the city's director of homeland security, said a decision about whether to allow residents in the 70115 and 70118 ZIP codes to return Wednesday and Friday will depend on conclusions reached at that meeting.

"We will reassess how we have done in reopening so far and the status of our water, sewerage, electricity and hospitals" across parts of the city left relatively unscathed by Hurricane Katrina, Ebbert said, adding that the projected direction of Tropical Storm Rita, presently in the Atlantic Ocean, also would be a factor in determining whether to reopen Uptown.

Allen on Saturday questioned Nagin's proposed timeline, calling it "extremely ambitious" and "extremely problematic." Tap water remains unfit for drinking and bathing in most parts of the city, and Rita posed another potential threat, he said.

In an interview Saturday with the Associate Press, Allen called on the mayor to be "mindful of the risks" and said he would share his concerns when they meet.

City officials continued to recommend that residents visit the city during daytime hours only and not stay overnight, Ebbert said. An 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew remains in effect, he said.

The city's initial phase of re-entry, which allowed business owners in the two Uptown postal codes to return, "went very, very well," Ebbert said, with an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 people passing military and police checkpoints to get back to their shops and restaurants.

No serious incidents were reported to health or police authorities, he said.

"I think there were a lot of

See **NAGIN**, A-11

'Help me, please don't let me die'

911 operators confront grim task, ghastly calls

By Brian Thevenot
Staff writer

As she took that first call from a woman trapped in her 9th Ward attic, 911 operator Lechia Allen ached with

the grim realization that the next call would be the same. And the next. And the next. She couldn't do a thing for any of them.

Working in the downtown 911 center at Broad and Gravier streets, next to the Falstaff antenna, Allen knew police wouldn't respond to calls while the winds of Hurricane Katrina roared. She knew the rescue operation wouldn't start for hours and, in many cases, days. Laboring under the heavy weight of helplessness, all Allen

and her 120 fellow operators could do was listen to the terrifying tales of rising waters, raging fires and parents holding their children toward the skies, above the floodwaters.

"They heard people taking their last breaths. They heard people holding children up in the peak of the attics, and dropping children in the water and watching them drown," said New Orleans Police Capt. Steve Gordon, chief of the 911 center.

Some of the nearly all-female staff

working with Allen, 44, took calls from the same neighborhoods where they knew their families had stayed to ride out the storm, she said. Some lost loved ones. Others haven't been found.

"Seek higher ground" — that was all that Allen could tell them, in the calmest voice she could muster. "I'm already on my roof," so many of them would respond.

See **911**, A-10

KEEPING THE FAITH



STAFF PHOTOS BY TED JACKSON

Deacon Adam Gillespie of First Baptist Church of Belle Chasse prays for special needs during an altar call Sunday.

There's the church, there's the steeple. But open the doors, and where are all the people? After being scattered by Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans area's faithful are slowly returning to the pews. See **Metro**



Marie Keeton of First Baptist Church of Belle Chasse sheds a tear Sunday during the church's first service since Hurricane Katrina moved through the area.



NNS PHOTO

A straight-shooting, take-charge 'John Wayne dude,' Lt. Gen. Russel Honore appeared to be exactly what New Orleans needed after Hurricane Katrina hit

THREE-STAR CELEBRITY

By Jeff Duncan
Staff writer

As he strides through the rubble that once was downtown New Orleans, the sturdy man with the aviator sunglasses, the black beret and three shiny silver stars is the focus of all eyes.

Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, the commanding general of Joint Task Force Katrina, is on the scene — and everybody knows it.

Police officers, relief workers and medical personnel flock to him to shake his hand or pose for pictures. One by one, U.S. senators fight their way through the crowd to congratulate him for his efforts.

His aide, Lt. Col. Richard Steele, constantly fields e-mails on his Blackberry for interview requests. Vanity Fair magazine, Larry King, "Meet the Press" and "Face the Nation" are jockeying for his time.

See **HONORE**, A-9

Tough-as-nails survivor had only a jug of water

Rescue workers take Gerald Martin to the hospital Friday. The 76-year-old spent 18 days in his Gentilly attic.



AP PHOTO

Rescuers find him 18 days after storm

By Michael Perlstein
Staff writer

When Eric Mijangos and J.D. Madden approached the modest one-story cottage on Painters Street in their Coast Guard flatboat, they were anticipating the same response

they got from all the other houses that day: silence.

Instead, they heard a faint but firm voice yell out, "Hey, over here."

The two California firefighters slogged through knee-high water, and with two swings of Mijangos' sledgehammer, they were through the front door and face-to-face with a miracle wearing jeans and a T-shirt: 76-year-old Gerald Martin.

See **SURVIVOR**, A-11

DAY 21 DEVELOPMENTS

The official death toll in metropolitan New Orleans: **676**

Evacuees in Milwaukee long for red beans and rice, See A-2

Plan would find temporary housing for more than 1 million in La., See A-3

Kenner storm brews between the mayor and the police chief, See A-6

Slidell hopes to broadcast information on recovery operations, See A-7

La. has been approved for more than \$700 million in public assistance, See A-11

Jefferson Parish's east bank headquarters damaged in storm, See B-1

Preservationists save centuries-old records from floodwaters, See B-1

Boat rescues, prayer, funeral all in a day's work for minister, See B-1

Next stop for returnees with trashed homes: the dump, See B-8



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